

is he not here, to wake by passionate words
some fire within
me? I am cold—cold as a loveless thing. Arthur
must have
read my letter by this time. If he cared for me,
he would
have come after me, would have taken me
back by force.
But he doesn't care. He 's entrammelled by this
woman—
fascinated by her—dominated by her. If a
woman wants
to hold a man, she has merely to appeal to what
is worst in
him. We make gods of men and they leave
us. Others
make brutes of them and they fawn and are
faithful. How
ludicrous life is! . . . Oh! it was mad of me to
come here,
horribly mad. And yet, which is the worst, I
wonder, to be
at the mercy of a man who loves one, or the
wife of a man
who in one's own house dishonours one? What
woman
knows? What woman in the whole world?
But will he
love me always, this man to whom I am giving
my life?
What do I bring him? Lips that have lost the
note of joy,
eyes that are blinded by tears, chill hands
and icy heart.
I bring him nothing. I must go back—no; I
can't go back,
my letter has put me in their power—Arthur
would not take
me back! That fatal letter! No! Lord
Darlington leaves
England to-morrow. I will go with him—I have no
choice.
*[Sits down for a few moments. Then starts up and
puts on her
cloak.]* No, no! I will go back, let Arthur do
with me what
he pleases. I can't wait here. It has been
madness my
coming. I must go at once. As for Lord
Darlington—Oh!
here he is! What shall I do? What can I say
to him?
Will he let me go away at all? I have heard
that men are
brutal, horrible . . . Oh! *[Hides her face in her
hands.]*

Enter Mrs. Erlynne L.

Mrs. Erlynne. Lady Windermere! *[Lady
Windermere starts
and looks up. Then recoils in contempt^*

Thank Heaven
I am in time. You must go back to your
husband's house
immediately.

Lady Windermere. Must?

Mrs. Erlynne. *[Authoritatively^* Yes, you must!
There is not

a second to be lost. Lord Darlington may
return at any
moment.

Lady Windermere. Don't come near me!

Mrs. Erlynne. Oh! You are on the brink of
ruin, you are on
the brink of a hideous precipice. You must
leave this place
at once, my carriage is waiting at the corner
of the street.
You must come with me and drive straight
home.